

The Defining Legacy of October 7

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In the days and weeks following the deadliest day for world Jewry since the Holocaust, we live within dual realities. On the one hand, everything is different, and the world is fundamentally divided into the time before the massacre and the time after. And on the other, everything that exists today was set into motion well before October 7. The latent antisemitism, depending on who one asks, was either lingering just beneath the surface, waiting to be unleashed, or was already there; people just weren't listening. The vulnerability of Israelis living on the border was felt with every rocket, every bout of gunfire heard but unseen coming from Gaza. The breach of trust that so many Israelis have felt with their government was protested for over a year, with citizens crying out for justice, aching to be heard, to fulfill the Zionist dream of nation-building for a new generation.

In the world after October 7, all that existed before continues to exist, but is now seen through new eyes – eyes wet with tears, wide open to the reality of this moment – eyes that saw a pogrom livestreamed, and are left with the question of how to meet this reality.

The world of Jewish education that existed on October 6 spoke to the needs of a community of learners who, as a collective, were not familiar with the vulnerability



of Jewishness that has been the hallmark of Am Yisrael for so much of our shared history. For a blip of time, there has been a moment of Jewish thriving, wherein it felt to many that the fears of yesterday could indeed be left in the past. Practitioners and thinkers in the arena of Jewish education had been able to explore what it means to cultivate Jewish identities and affinities that are based on thriving, and one seeing the value-add that Judaism can bring to one's life, rather than Jewish selves grounded in fear, defiance, and otherness. With the shattering of security felt on October 7 and in the subsequent days of antisemitic vitriol and threat around the world, there has been an awakening of Jewish identity and a sense of peoplehood. Whether October 7 spoke to the contemporary Jewish community's collective memory of Kishinev, or the Holocaust, or the Yom Kippur War, in its aftermath it has become clear: The Jewish education of tomorrow must bind together proactive Jewish pride, responsiveness to Jewish vulnerability, and recognition of the distortion to the sense of self that this moment has wrought.

Israel education places the learner, the educator, and Israel itself in a triangulated relationship. Israel educators are tasked with helping their learners build personal connections with Israel, a process which is a key component of a lifelong Jewish journey. Today, there are new questions. How does one connect a learner with an Israel that is broken and in pain? How does that relationship remain reciprocal, rather than one of diaspora Jewish benevolence? What does it mean to relate to Israel in the context of a war, however just? What does Jewish pride mean and how

does it thrive, even when met with hatred, and fear, and the silencing of Jewish joy that antisemitism so often does?

Jewish education, and most centrally, Israel education, are called upon at this moment to make meaning out of mourning. To inspire and empower learners and the Jewish people as a whole to ensure that the defining legacy of October 7 is not the destruction, but rather the awakening, and the strength fostered in its wake.